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SUBJECT: NATIONWIDE VILLAGE ELECTIONS SEE HIGH TURNOUT AND  
LOWER VIOLENCE

REF: MANILA 3547

¶1. (U) Summary: High voter turnout of between 70-75 percent and lower levels of violence than in previous elections marked the Philippines' October 29 nationwide village elections. Voters in nearly 42,000 districts elected over 300,000 councilors who will manage day-to-day government affairs at the neighborhood level. An equal number of "youth councilors," aged 15 to 18, were elected separately to represent youth concerns within the village leadership structures. The elections were more peaceful and orderly compared to previous election seasons, and only a relative handful of villages were unable to carry out the vote. However, the elections were not free of violence or fraud. The police are actively investigating 29 election-related deaths and 24 injuries, many of which occurred on election day and the day before the polls opened. End Summary.

¶2. (U) More than 35 million voters went to the polls on October 29 to elect local-level officials in their neighborhoods and villages, or barangays (reftel). Voter turnout was impressive -- perhaps as high as 75 percent of the 51 million registered voters. Acting Elections Commission Chairman Rex Borra speculated that the turnout exceeded that of the 2002 village elections (68 percent), and may even surpass the May 2007 midterm Senate and Congressional elections (73 percent). While these are non-party elections in which candidates did not run under the banner of political parties, there was national political interest in the outcome as the local council leaders play a key role in getting out the vote during Congressional and Presidential polls. Local council members also receive some benefits for their service, including a small stipend (from \$75 to \$450 per month), health insurance and free education tuition for their children at local public schools.

¶3. (U) As in years past, the elections in some districts were messy and even violent. The Philippine National Police reported 53 election-related violent incidents since the start of the campaign period on September 27, including 29 fatalities. The majority of the 29 deaths were candidates or incumbent village officials. These estimates are considerably lower when compared to the 2002 village elections that left 75 people dead and 69 others wounded.

¶4. (U) There were also reports of vote-buying, especially in depressed neighborhoods of metro-Manila and in the Visayas, as well as reports of "flying voters" (a Philippine practice in which candidates hire people to vote under fictitious names in precincts other than their own). The Commission on Elections declared a failure of elections in a few dozen precincts because of reported violence at the polling stations, or where poll workers failed to report to work

because of intimidation. The majority of reported failures were in Mindanao, including three towns in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM). Reports of fraud renewed calls for automation by the 2010 presidential elections.

¶5. (U) Civil-society monitoring groups were present in most precincts and played an active roll as poll watchers throughout election day. Henrietta de Villa, chairperson of the largest poll-watching group, highlighted a "noticeable improvement compared to the May 14 midterm elections," citing fewer voter complaints and decreased levels of violence. The Commission on Elections is expected to proclaim the winners within a few days, except in villages where the results were challenged or the Commission declared a failure of the election.

¶6. (SBU) Comment: While these elections were not flawless, the high voter turnout demonstrates the Philippines' -- and more importantly, its citizens' -- commitment to the democratic process. The overwhelming majority of the 42,000 villages had few, if any, problems on election day. While violence and fraud did affect some districts, these village elections were clearly a step towards a freer, fairer, and more peaceful electoral process.  
KENNEY